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YUSHCHENKO ELECTION COALITION DIVIDED OVER ROLE FOR LYTVYN

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As the Ukrainian parliament adjourns today for its summer recess, Western observers are increasingly noting the divisions inside President Viktor Yushchenko's team. However, such commentaries typically focus on the wrong divisions.

In a report entitled, "Political Rivalries Threaten Ukraine's Reforms," the Financial Times (July 4) focused on divisions between Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and the free-market proponents grouped around Petro Poroshenko, secretary of the National Security and Defense Council. This split between left-right populists (Socialists, Tymoshenko) and free marketers (Yushchenko, Poroshenko, First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoliy Kinakh) has been noted before (see EDM, May 11). Although this division does exist, and personal relations between Tymoshenko and Poroshenko are poor, focusing on this schism misses two fundamental points.

First, although a populist, Tymoshenko is not ideologically determined, unlike left populists in the Socialist Party. This was clearly seen in parliamentary debates over legislation to join the WTO, which Tymoshenko and her faction supported but the Socialists (and Communists) opposed. Tymoshenko's penchant for state capitalism was also short lived, from February to May, since she no longer supports price controls. The memorandum signed by the government, president, and parliament at the recent mini-Davos summit in Kyiv ended speculation about mass re-privatization (see EDM, June 29).

Second, Yushchenko must decide the expediency of forging an electoral alliance with Parliamentary Speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn for the March 2006 parliamentary elections. Such an alliance would include Lytvyn's People's Party (the former Agrarians), Yushchenko's People's Union-Our Ukraine, and Tymoshenko's Fatherland party. Currently polling only 2-3%, Lytvyn's party might not cross the 3% threshold on its own.

According to Serhiy Skrypnyk, head of the Kyiv-based Evolution Media Research and Analysis Service, "Yushchenko needs Lytvyn because Tymoshenko is too radical for Yushchenko. She still relies on revolutionaries more than on the ruling elites. Lytvyn helps Yushchenko to incorporate the former, not-too-compromised elites in the new authorities while distancing them from the opposition."

Yushchenko's team needs to prevent Lytvyn from joining the ranks of the hard-line opposition parties (Regions of Ukraine and Social Democratic Party-United) or from becoming a third force positioned between the authorities and the hard-line opposition.

First Deputy Prime Minister Roman Besmertnyi, the main organizer behind Yushchenko's new People's Union-Our Ukraine Party, does not see Lytvyn bringing anything positive to an alliance, but his inclusion would ensure "that there will be no minuses" from him either (Ukrayinska pravda, July 2).

Lytvyn sat on the fence throughout the 2004 presidential election, although his People's Party officially supported Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich. Lytvyn, however, did keep parliament open during the protests and when the legislature refused to accept the official results declaring Yanukovich the

winner.

Lytvyn's parliamentary faction has tripled to 40 deputies since the Orange Revolution, as moderate defectors from former president Leonid Kuchma's camp have rallied under his umbrella. Lytvyn also has the loyal Democratic Ukraine satellite faction of 20 deputies, giving him a reliable bloc of at least 60 deputies.

Poroshenko remains Lytvyn's main lobbyist in the Yushchenko coalition. Speaking about Lytvyn during the 2004 election Poroshenko averred, "I am certain that this person undertook a major role in the revolution" (Ukrayinska pravda, June 29). He and Lytvyn have similar backgrounds in the Kuchma camp. Until 1998-99 he was aligned with the SDPUo, but after leaving the SDPUo Poroshenko created the Solidarity parliamentary faction with Lytvyn's assistance. In 2000-2001 Solidarity merged with Regions of Ukraine.

Like Yushchenko, Poroshenko only went into the opposition against Kuchma after the April 2001 parliamentary vote of no confidence in then-Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko's government. New transcripts of conversations in Kuchma's office in June 2000, only ten months earlier, quote Poroshenko describing his loyalty to the president. The transcripts also reveal the hostility Poroshenko and Kuchma held toward then-First Deputy Prime Minister Tymoshenko (Ukrayinska pravda, July 6).

Poroshenko and Lytvyn are also united by their reluctance to pursue the inquiry into the murder of opposition journalist Heorhiy Gongadze. Although head of the presidential administration when Gongadze was murdered in fall 2000, Lytvyn has not been called to give testimony to the Prosecutor's office. Rumors suggest that Lytvyn "earned" immunity thanks to his stance during the 2004 election.

Ukrainian commentators and Gongadze's widow, Myroslava, believe that it was Lytvyn who lobbied Kuchma to order his Interior Minister to "deal" with Gongadze in September 2000. Lytvyn has blocked the parliamentary commission investigating the murder from presenting its findings, as the report accuses Lytvyn of involvement. Yushchenko and his Our Ukraine faction have also voted against hearing the report, which by law should have been heard in 2003 (repin.ua, June 15).

Local parties members and key Yushchenko allies in Kyiv are resisting an alliance between People's Union-Our Ukraine and Lytvyn, because they see former Kuchma officials taking political refuge in Lytvyn's party. State Television Channel 1 President Taras Stetskiy complained that those who have joined Lytvyn's People's Party "are all from Kuchma's guard!" (Ekspress, June 21). He fears that an alliance with these former Kuchma supporters would harm the ratings of People's Union-Our Ukraine.

Besmertnyi admitted that local branches of People's Union-Our Ukraine are pressuring him to not cooperate with Lytvyn. The head of the Kharkiv branch of the People's Union-Our Ukraine, for example, complained that former Kuchma supporters are joining Lytvyn's People's Party to ingratiate themselves with the new authorities (razom.org.ua, July 4).

Lytvyn has fiercely responded by accusing People's Union-Our Ukraine and Tymoshenko's representatives of doing "everything in their power to discredit the idea [of an election alliance] at its birth" (Ukrayinska pravda, July 7). He is now threatening to have his party independently contest the 2006 election.

